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THE MUṆḌAKA UPANIṢAD

transcreated from Sanskrit

by

P. Lal

P. Lal is honorary Professor of English in St. Xavier's College, Calcutta. He was Special Professor of Indian Studies, at Hofstra University, New York, 1962-63, and has lectured widely on Indian literature to English, American, and Australian universities He was a delegate from India to the P E N. International Writers Conference in New York in June 1966, and Visiting Professor in the University of Illinois for the spring semester of 1968. Transcreated the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Mahānārāyaṇa Upanisads on a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship award in 1969-70 Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature, Hofstra University, spring 1971. Distinguished Visiting Professor and Consultant, Albion College, April-May 1972. Prentiss M. Brown Distinguished Visiting Professor, Albion College, January-May 1973. Robert Norton Visiting Professor, Ohio University, September 1973-June 1974 Visiting Professor of Indian Culture, Hartwick College, September-October 1975. Eli Lilly Visiting Professor, Berea College, February-May 1977 Honorary Doctorate of Letters, Western Maryland College, 1977. Currently at work on the complete English version of the Mahābhārata. He is sixty-eight, married, and has a son, 41, and a daughter, 37. Recipient of the Padma Shri award in 1970. Delegate to Asian Poets' Conference, Bangkok, 1988; Cambridge Literary Seminar, 1989; Harborfront Poetry Reading Series, Toronto Canada, 1989.

to

Śhyāmaśree

at whose request

this transcreation

was begun and completed

in Puri

in May 1997

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What an Upaniṣad! Relentless and ceaseless in its pure idealism, concerned only with the thought-to-be-impossible Transcendental Divinity, the beyond-even-Brahman experience of Tat-Sat, That Which Is, the Muṇḍaka suggests that all ritualistic practice is futile if its aim is to achieve an experience of the Ultimate Truth.

All work fetters. Good deeds fetter us to a temporary heaven; ill deeds to a temporary hell. Heaven is a brief punishment for reward-seeking virtue; hell a brief punishment for the selfishness of vice. Punishment term over, one returns to the world of karma and saṁsāra, the messy entangling round of birth and re-birth.

Only meditation, Ātman-knowledge, seeking Truth for its own sake, like a flower that enjoys the air it breathes, provides the coordinates that spell the freedom variously described as mokṣa, mukti, liberation, salvation, śāntiḥ, the peace that passeth understanding, the ineffable vision, perhaps satori, may be nirvāna (nibbāna), surely paradiso.

Raja Rammohun Roy translated this Upaniṣad in 1819. In his brief, brilliant introduction he made clear the central advice of the "Moonduk Opunishud" : "the observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude."

Even more important, however, is the confidence of the seer who composed the Muṇḍaka that "eternal beatitude" is not only possible but also the only desirable goal for a human being to seek and pursue. The Upanisad is categorical in its condemnation of those who reject this goal and those who seek it through rites and rituals in the rat-race loaded with desire: they are "utterly stupid": *pramūḍhāḥ.*

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad

FIRST MUṆḌAKA

Canto 1

1 Brahmā was the first god
to manifest himself.
He is the Creator of the universe
he is its supporter.
The source of all knowledge
is Brahmā-knowledge.
This knowledge was imparted by Brahmā
to his eldest son Atharvā.

2 In the distant past
the knowledge Brahmā gave Atharvā
was passed by Atharvā to Añgira.
Añgira passed it to Satyavaha
of the line of Bharadvāja.
And Satyavaha passed this knowledge
to Añgirasa.
The knowledge was transmitted
from senior to junior
from higher to lower.

3 The mahā-householder Śaunaka approached Añgirasa in the prescribed manner and asked, "Divinely learned one, what is that, knowing which, all this becomes known?"

4 He replied, "Brahmā-knowers say there are two kinds of knowledge: the Beyond and the not-beyond, the Absolute and the relative, the Spiritual and the secular.

5 The not-beyond consists of the Ṛg-veda, the Yajur-veda, the Sāma-veda and the Atharva-veda, śikṣā-phonetics, *kalpa*-rituals, *vyākarṇā*-grammar, *chanda*-prosody, *jyotisa*-astrology. The Beyond teaches that which never deeays.

6 The invisible
ungraspable
sourceless
formless
without eyes and ears
without hands and feet
eternal
all-pervading
everywhere-moving
subtlest of the subtle
undecaying
the source of all creation–
That
the wise see everywhere.

7 The spider spins out a web
and secretes it back into itself
The earth grows grass and trees
Humans emanate hair
From the Undecaying emerges this universe.

8 Brahmā creates
through the discipline of *tapas*
From that
is born the potent seed of food
From that seed
comes the life-breath *prāṇa*
From that *prāṇa*
comes the cosmic mind *manaḥ*
From *manaḥ*
comes that-which-is *satya*
From *satya*
come all the worlds
From the worlds
comes karma
From karma
comes non-death
the immortality called *amṛta.*

9 From That
who knows all in totality
and knows all in detail
whose knowledge is the product
of the creative discipline of *tapas*
From That evolves all this:
name
form
food.

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CANTO
OF THE FIRST MUNDAKA

FIRST MUṆDAKA

Canto 2

1 The Truth That Is is this:
Wise poets saw many karmas
mentioned in the mantras
of the three Vedas.
If you seek rewards
then perform those karmas
This is the way for those
who do good deeds

2 Light the fire
and when the flames shoot up
pour the oblations
between the two sides of the fire.

3 If you perform
the Agnihotra sacrifice
without the rituals
of Darśa
Paurnamāsa
Caturmāsya
and Āgrayana
and without inviting guests
If you do not pour oblations
at the right time
If the Vaiśvadeva ritual
is missing

Then the sacrifice is vitiated
The performer loses all the seven worlds.

4 Kālī Karālī Manojavā
Sulohitā Sudhūmravrṇā
Sphuliṅginī and devī Viśvarucī—
these are the flickering
seven tongues of fire:
Black Terrible Mind-Swift
Bright-Red Thick-Smoke-Coloured
Shooting-Sparks and Multi-Rayed.

5 These oblations become
the rays of the sun
and lifting the perfect performer
they carry him where
the lord of the gods
lives above everyone else

6 "Come! Come!" they say
"This is the Brahmaloka
the heaven
which your good deeds have earned."
With these sweet words
and with adoring respect
the flickering oblations
transport the sacrificer
along the path of the rays of the sun

7 Eighteen people are needed
for this sacrifice:
the performer

his wife
and sixteen Brahmins
It is a fragile raft.
As mentioned earlier,
this is inferior karma
The fools
who praise this as superior
suffer old age and death
again and again

8 Enveloped in non-knowledge
smothered, in *avidyā*
these fools think they are paṇḍits
they think they are wise
They stumble again and again
like the blind led by the blind.

9 Misled by non-knowledge
in so many ways
they are like children.
They pride themselves
saying "We are so successful!"
They are lost
in attachment to rituals
and do not realise it.
They enjoy a brief heaven,
and then it ends—
and they are grief-stricken.

10 They are utterly stupid
They think ritual sacrifices and charities

are the best things to do.
They know nothing better.
They enjoy the fruits of good deeds
in a brief heaven
and return to this world
or to something even worse.

11 There are others
the serene and wise ones
who live on alms in forests
They are the ones
who practise *tapasyā* and *śraddhā*
who are pure-minded
They pass through the door of the sun
and attain the realm of *amṛta*
the abode of the undecaying Ātman
the realm of the Spirit Puruṣa.

12 The Brahman-seeker examines
the worlds attained by karma.
The Brahman-seeker practises
detachment from karma.
Brahman is not created by karma
and cannot be attained by karma.
With sacred dry wood in his hands
the Brahman-seeker
goes to a Veda-versed Brahman-devotee

13 He goes to the wise one
whose mind is calm
whose senses are disciplined

He goes to him to know
    the truth of the undecaying Purusa
    the truth of Brahman-knowledge
        Brahma-vidyā as it really is.

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO
OF THE FIRST MUNDAKA

SECOND MUṆḌAKA

Canto 1

1 The Truth That Is is this :

O Somya
From a blazing fire
issue
thousands of fiery sparks—
So from the Aksara
the Undecaying One
issue
swarms of creatures
and then dissolve into it.

2 This divine Puruṣa

is radiant
without form
present outside and inside
without *prāṇa*-breath
without mind
pure
and higher even
than that
which is higher
than Akṣara
the Undecaying One
the Primal Syllable.

3 From it

emerge

prāna-breath

manah-mind

the sense-organs

space

air

fire

water

and the all-supporting earth.

4 Its head

is heaven

Its eyes

the moon and the sun

Its ears

the directions

Its speech

the Vedas

Its *prāṇa*-breath

the wind

Its heart

the universe

Its feet

the earth

It is

the innermost Ātman

of all creatures—

sarva-bhūta-antarātmā.

5 From it

comes the fire

that fuels the sun

From the moon

is born the Parjanya-cloud

bringing rain

From the rain

comes the lush vegetation

of earth

From males

comes the semen

inserted in females

From Puruṣa

comes the teeming variety

of life.

6 From it

come the Ṛg, Sāma and Yajur-vedas

From it

dīkṣā-initiation

all *yajñas*

animal sacrifices

dakṣiṇā-offerings

the period of a ritual

the ritual-performer

the worlds

purified by the moon

and the worlds

of the sun

7 From it

come the various gods
the Sādhyas
human beings
animals and birds
prāṇa-breath and *apāna*-outbreath
paddy and wheat
tapasyā and *śraddhā*
truth and *brahmacarya*
and codes of conduct.

8 From it

come the seven *prāṇas*
two eyes
two nostrils
two ears
and mouth

From it

the corresponding sense-perceptions
the objects perceived
the seven states of consciousness
the seven seats of the seven organs

The sense-organs stray

when not asleep in the cave of the heart.

9 From it

come the oceans and mountains

From it

all the streams and rivers

From it

come all the trees and plants

From it

every rasa

every juice

every essence

It exists

the Innermost Self

the *antarātmā*

surrounded by the multitudinosity

of creation

10 O Somya! This very Purusa is the universe, the cosmos. It is karma, it is *tapas*, it is the supreme Brahman, deathless, *paramṛtam*. Who sees it hidden in the cave of the heart, he, in this world itself, breaks the bond of non-knowledge.

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CANTO
OF THE SECOND MUNDAKA

SECOND MUṆḌAKA

Canto 2

1 Self-shining
seated in the heart
moving in the heart
the great support—
It vitalises
whatever moves
whatever is alive
whatever blinks
whatever is.

It
is what is and what is not
sat and *asat*
It is the Adorable One
beyond all analyais
most precious of all
most worth knowing.

2 Radiant
smaller than the smallest
support of the worlds and their dwellers
the undecaying Brahman
It
is *prāṇa*-breath
vāk-speech and *manaḥ*-mind

satya-truth
amṛta-non-death.
O Somya
strive to know it
penetrating its essence.

3 The Upaniṣads are the great bow
Meditation is the arrow—
Lift the bow, Somya!
Pull the string tight!
Aim! Fix your mind on the target:
It—the Undecaying One.
Shoot!

4 Auṁ is the bow
The ātman is the arrow
Brahman is the target—
Make no mistake!
Shoot at the target!
Shoot till the arrow
And the target are one!

5 Strive to know only that Ātman
which fuses into one
heaven and earth and inter-space
and mind and all the *prāṇa*-breaths.
Stop talking about other things!
This is the bridge
to non-death

6 The spokes of a chariot wheel
unite in the hub

The veins of the body
unite in the heart
The multi-formed Ātman
is One within
It is Auṁ.
Meditate on it
if you seek to go beyond darkness.
Vāḥ svasti!
May all go well with you!

7 That
which knows all in totality
and in detail
That
whose glory shines
in all the world
That
is the Ātman
It dwells
in the radiant space of Brahman
Brahma-pure
the city of the heart.
Leader of *prāna*-breath and the body
manifested in the mind
it rests in the heart
surrounded by the body.
The wise know
they are one with it—
They know it

as *ānanda-rūpam-amṛtam*
the full-bliss-form of non-death.

8 When that One
is seen as far and near
high and low
cause and effect
one's heart-knots are loosened
one's karma is wiped out.

9 The Light of lights
The Seamless One
The Pure One
Sheathed in the shining
golden space of the heart—
Those who know the Ātman
know that this is so.

10 No sun shines there, no moon,
no stars, no lightning.
How does it dazzle then?
By its own light.
When it shines, everything shines.
By its light shines everything.

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO
OF THE SECOND MUNDAKA

THIRD MUṆḌAKA

Canto 1

1 Two lovely-feathered birds
always sit together
on the same tree.
One eats
the *pippala* fruit.
The other
does not eat.
It only watches.

2 Ignorant
the Puruṣa sits on the same tree
and grieves.
But when it sees
the other
the glorious other
it grieves no more.

3 When you see
the Supreme Puruṣa
the Absolute Divine
the Golden-Coloured One
the Creator of creators
the Womb-of-Brahmā
yon go beyond
punya-pāpa
virtue-and-vice

you become pure
you become serene
you achieve oneness.

4 It is the *prāṇa*
the life-breath
of all creatures.
Who knows it
does not talk of anything
but it.
Such a person
delights in the innocent joy
of the Ātman.
Such a person
is forever fulfilled
with Ātman-playfulness.
Such a person
is the finest
of Brahman-knowers.

5 This—
the Radiant One
the Pure One
the Ātman within
the body hidden
always hidden
is seen by ascetics
who practise brahmacarya
and truth and *tapasyā*.

6 *Satyam eva jayate:*

Truth alone triumphs,

never untruth.

The open road

to the gods

is truth

Only *ṛṣis* who renounce

achieve the Supreme

which is Truth

7 It is immense

divine

radiant

beyond thought

subtler than the subtlest

farther than the furthest

but very near too

It resides

in the cave

of the heart

8 It

cannot be seen

cannot be described

not by speech

not by any other means

not by *tapasyā*

not by karma.

Only

when one is blessed

by the grace of wisdom

only then
by meditation
can one see
this Seamless One
this Indivisible One.

9 The five-fold *prāṇa*-breath
is spread
everywhere in the body.
So also
the subtle Ātman
that is known by the mind.
It permeates
the perception and *prāṇa*
of all creatures.
When the mind is pure
the Ātman
reveals itself.

10 The pure-minded get
whatever worlds are desired
whatever joys are wished for
Anyone seeking one's own welfare
respects such an Ātman-knower.

HERE ENDS THE FIRST CANTO
OF THE THIRD MUṆḌAKA

THIRD MUṆḌAKA

Canto 2

1 The person who knows
this Supreme Brahman
which is pure
which sustains the universe
which is radiant—
Such a person
is revered
by the wise
who have discarded kāma.
These are the wise
who transcend the seed
and are not born again

2 A person
who is propelled by desire
to seek desirable objects
gets re-born to achieve those desires
But a person
who feels he has no desires
for his desires are all fulfilled—
such a person
is Self-sufficient
such a person
is Ātman-fulfilled.

3 This Ātman
is not attained
by religious discourses
It is not attained
by intellectual excellence
It is not attained
by listening to revelations
This Ātman
reveals its true nature
only to the person
who seeks its true nature.

4 This Ātman
is not attained
by those who lack strength
nor by those
who are lost
in self-delusion
nor by those
who merely work
but do not renounce
But the person
who uses these methods
and strives assiduously
enters the Ātman
the Brahma-*dhāma*
the Abode of Brahman

5 Knowledge-fulfilled *rsis*
Self-sufficient

Ātman-fulfilled
Free from attachments
Serenely happy—
These wise persons
Seeing everywhere
The all-pervading One
Are united with the Ātman
And enter the All.

6 Those who have striven
And grasped the truths
Of the Vedānta wisdom
By the yoga of renunciation—
They attain *paramṛta*
The non-death felicity
In the realm of Brahman—
They are the free ones.

7 Then the fifteen parts
of the body:

prāṇa
śraddhā
ākāśa-space
vāyu-air
jyoti-fire
ap-water
pṛthivī-earth
the senses
mind
food

strength

tapas

the Vedas

yajñas

the worlds—

return to their source.

The organs

return to their respective deities.

The karmas

together with the Ātman

manifested as mind

become one

with the Undecaying

Beyond-All

Transcendent One.

8 The flowing rivers

of many names and forms

discarding names and forms

submerge and merge

in the depths of the ocean.

Similarly,

when the Highest of all

the Radiant Puruṣa

is realised,

name and form vanish

9 Whoever knows

that Brahman

the Supreme One

becomes
that Brahman
the Supreme One.
None in his family
is born
without Brahman-knowledge.
He crosses over grief.
He transcends
vice and demerit.
Freed from the knots
that bind
the cave of the heart
he relishes
amṛta
the nectar of non-death.

10 This is the word
of the sacred texts:
Impart Brahma-vidyā
the wisdom-of-Brahman
only to the person
who practises the duties
described in the sacred texts
who studies the sacred texts
with the required *śraddhā*
who performs the Ekarṣi ritual
who carries fire on his head
as enjoined in the Veda. . . .

11 In the distant past
the *ṛṣi* Aṅgiras
taught this truth.
Those who refrain
from the rites
and the disciplines
are unfit for the study
of the truths
of this text.
To the supreme *ṛṣis*
we offer obeisance.
Namaḥ!
To the supreme *ṛṣis*
we offer obeisance.
Namaḥ!

HERE ENDS THE SECOND CANTO
OF THE THIRD MUNDAKA

May the gods grant
that we hear only the good
May the gods grant
that we see only the good
May we with steady mind and boody
praise the Divine
May the gods grant
that we live in peace. . .
śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

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